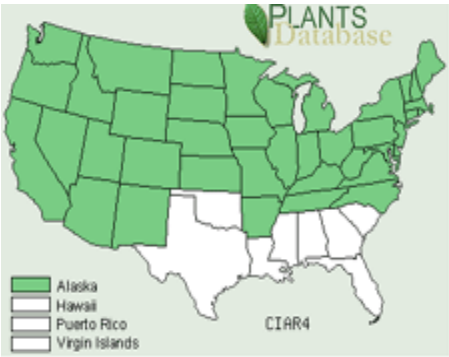
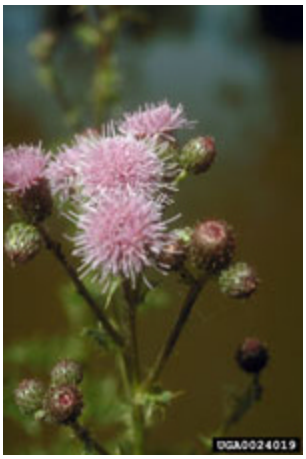
Canada Thistle

Cirsium arvense (L.) Scop.

Distribution Map Canada thistle is distributed throughout the northern U.S., from northern California to Maine and southward to Virginia.



DESCRIPTION: Canada thistle is an herbaceous perennial in the aster family with erect stems 1½-4 feet tall, prickly leaves and an extensive creeping rootstock. Stems are branched, often slightly hairy, and ridged. Leaves are lance-shaped, irregularly lobed with spiny, toothed margins and are borne singly and alternately along the stem. Rose-purple, lavender, or sometimes white flower heads appear from June through October, generally, and occur in rounded, umbrella-shaped clusters.



ECOLOGICAL THREAT: Natural communities that are threatened by Canada thistle include non-forested plant communities such as prairies, barrens, savannas, glades, sand dunes, fields and meadows that have been impacted by disturbance. This highly invasive thistle prevents the coexistence of other plant species through shading, competition for soil resources and possibly through the release of chemical toxins poisonous to other plants.

HABITAT IN THE U S: Canada thistle grows in barrens, glades, meadows, prairies, fields, pastures, and waste places. It does best in disturbed upland areas but also invades wet areas with fluctuating water levels such as stream bank sedge meadows and wet prairies.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT APPROACHES: Management of Canada thistle can be achieved through hand-cutting, mowing, controlled burning, and chemical means, depending on the level of infestation and the type of area being managed. Due to its perennial nature, entire plants must be killed in order to prevent regrowth from rootstock.

References: http://www.nps.gov www.invasive.org